Counting Consequences

One of the nation's leading demographers points to population changes that will shape the next decade.

BY WILLIAM H. FREY

Slowing immigration, aging baby boomers, a growing population of Latinos and the beginning of a "cultural generation gap" are all part of the mosaic created by the 2010 census.

The national head count this time around was a much scaled down version of earlier censuses—only 10 questions were asked of each resident. And the old 50-plus item "long form" questionnaire, sent to a sample of residents, was eliminated.

Yet, by providing "just the facts" about the nation's population size, along with its age, race and household make up, the latest decennial count offers an authoritative, in some cases astounding, look at a country that has undergone sweeping demographic shifts.

Those shifts will direct the reshuffling of political lines occurring now as states finish the redistricting process, which follows every census. Some states are losing representation in Congress, while others, Texas in particular, will be gaining. Less apparent is how state policymakers will address these shifting demographics that may require changes in everything from schools to the workforce to health care.

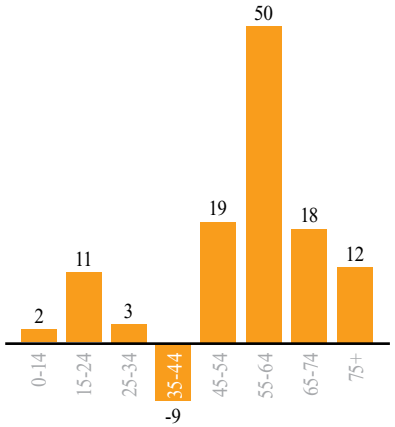
Michigan, the only state to see a population decline, lost 0.6 percent of its people.

Slow Growth

Although many Americans have the image of the United States being overrun by people, especially immigrants, the population growth rate registered for the previous decade was a tepid 9.7 percent, far below the 13.2 percent in the 1990s and even lower than the recession-plagued 1980s. To see a slower growth rate, we have to look back at the Great Depression when growth was a mere 7.3 percent.

Two things account for this. First, the immigration wave petered out in the last half of the decade as the economy started to sputter. The 1 million-a-year immigrant pace that characterized the 1990s and early 2000s has fallen sharply in recent years. But the greatest long-term generator of slower national growth is the aging of our population and a commensurate decline in the birth rate. Our median age is now 37.2 compared with 32.6 in 1990. Yet our national growth of almost 1 percent a year is far more robust than more geriatric nations such as Germany and Japan. And in some parts of the country, growth hasn't slowed at all. Nevada and Arizona continued to lead with 2000-2010 growth rates of 35 percent and 25 percent, respectively, despite dramatic late-decade slowdowns.

Percentage Growth of Age Groups, 2000-2010



Source: William H. Frey analysis of U.S. census data, 2011

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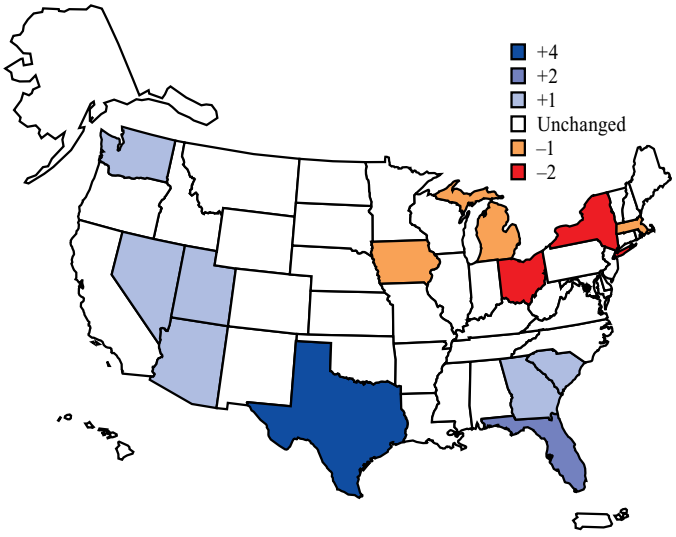
Changes in Congressional Seats



Source: William H. Frey analysis of U.S. census data, 2011

Still Going South

Nevada's population increased by 35 percent, making it the fastest growing state.

Sun Belt states in the South and West have consistently gained population and political clout from their Northeast and Midwest counterparts. Since the 1980 census, the Sun Belt has held a majority of people and congressional seats. It now contains 60 percent of the population and will hold a 263-to-172 seat advantage in the 113th Congress. Even in the Sun Belt, however, the demographic trend has shifted.

From 1950 to 1990, California, Florida and Texas accounted for two-thirds of all Sun Belt congressional seat gains. In the 2000 census, however, the "big three" states commanded only five of the 12 seat gains, and, only six of the 12 gains from the 2010 census. For the first time since statehood, California did not gain any seats, while nearby states—Arizona, Nevada, Utah and Washington—each gained one. If the recent mid-decade, bubble-induced migration from California to these more affordable neighbors had continued, the Golden State might actually have lost a seat.

Texas saw the largest increase in population, adding more than 4.3 million people.

Despite this dispersion within the Sun Belt, Texas wound up the big winner in the 2010 reapportionment sweepstakes. The Lone Star state gained four congressional seats, more than any other state. It led the nation in numeric growth for the first time ever. California held that honor for 80 years. As growth rates of Sun Belt high flyers such as Arizona, Florida and Nevada plummeted over the past three years, Texas held its own because of its relative immunity to extreme housing and job market downturns. It also benefited from the intake of Hurricane Katrina evacuees from Louisiana. They may have cost Louisiana a seat, the only Sun Belt congressional loss, and added one to Texas.

Minorities and Growth

Houston, Atlanta and Dallas-Fort Worth were the fastest growing metro areas, increasing by nearly 25 percent.

The first decade of this new century represents a sharp pivot from last century's America and our future, with respect to race and demographics. In contrast to a time when we were a largely black-and-white nation with robust population growth, the country now offers a juxtaposition of an aging white population with burgeoning, "new minority" Latino and Asian populations.

In 2010, Texas joined California, Hawaii, New Mexico and Washington, D.C., in having a majority-minority population.

The following statistics tell it all: Of the 27.3 million added to our population between 2000 and 2010, only 2.3 million were Anglos, representing a little more than 8 percent of the growth. This compares with a 20 percent contribution by Anglos in the 1990s, with even higher rates in earlier decades. This time around, the Latino population accounted for well over half the gains, with the next largest contribution coming from Asians. So while Anglos still make up 64 percent of our population, our nearly 10 percent growth as a country would be more like 4 percent were it not for Latinos and Asians.

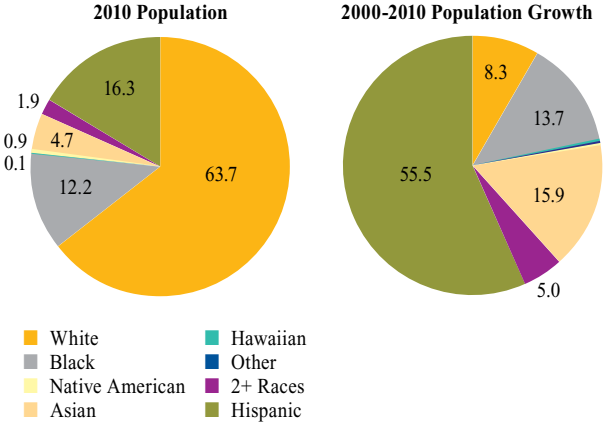
More than half the growth between 2000-2010 was because of the increase in the Hispanic population.

The combination of Latinos, Asians and people who identified as multiracial accounted for all or most of the growth in 33 states. Not only were they leading contributors to Florida, Texas and California, but also to Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio and Pennsylvania, states struggling to grow at all. They are dependent on new minorities for their demographic survival. Michigan was the only state to lose population.

The Asian population grew faster than any other major racial group.

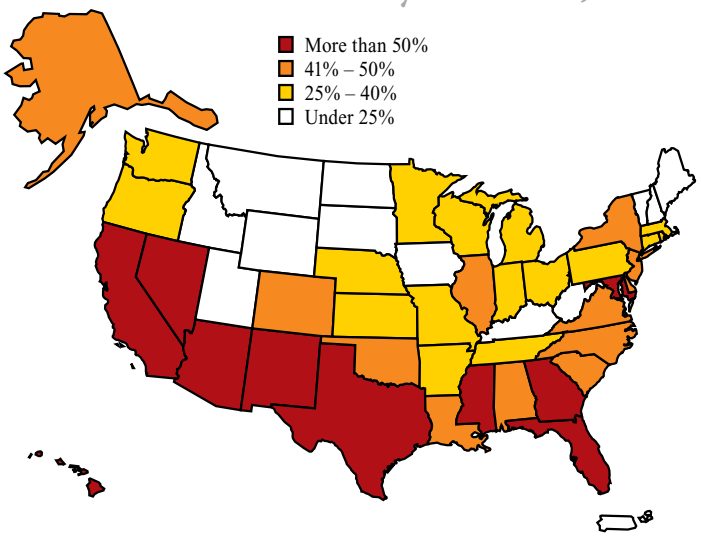
Perhaps most important to our nation's future is the shift in the child population. During the last 10 years, there was an absolute decline of 4.3 million Anglos under age 18, as well as a somewhat smaller decline of black youths. Latinos, Asians and to a lesser degree multiracial children contributed all of the growth in the number of children. This is perhaps more telling about our nation's future than any other statistic.

Race/Ethnic Shares



Source: William H. Frey analysis of U.S. census data, 2011

Percent Minority Children, 2010



Source: William H. Frey analysis of U.S. census data, 2011

Reversal for Blacks

The shifts in black populations within the country represent a reversal of past patterns of the last century: the Great Migration from the South to the North and the large concentration into segregated city neighborhoods.

The first reversal took hold in the 1990s, but continues in full force: an African-American shift back to the South. Economic progress, cultural ties and an emerging black middle class have driven greater numbers of African Americans to prosperous Southern cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, Houston and Raleigh at the same time black populations in Illinois and Michigan showed net losses for the first time. About three-quarters of the country's black growth last decade took place in the South, compared with 65 percent in the 1990s.

Minorities currently account for 35 percent of the U.S. population, and are expected to reach 50 percent by 2042.

Especially new this decade is a "black flight" away from large cities. Among the 30 largest cities with high African-American concentrations, 19 showed losses in their black populations. This loss was greatest in two black magnets of the past: Detroit and Chicago. But Atlanta, Dallas and Houston felt it, too, as black residents moved to the suburbs.

A new generation of African Americans spurn the segregated city neighborhoods of their parents and grandparents and are following earlier generations of whites to the suburbs. The Census confirmed that segregated neighborhoods are declining; 92 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas showed such declines.

Aging and "Younging"

Our population is aging everywhere. Last year, all 80 million baby boomers had passed at least their 45th birthday, and the oldest began turning age 65 this past January. The over 45 age group grew 18 times faster than the rest of the population during the last decade. Topping that growth were the 55-to-64-year-olds, whose numbers increased by 50 percent.

These national numbers vary across states, of course. Although all states are aging, only 27 are also "younging." Nationally, the under-18 population grew by a mere 2.6 percent. Moreover, the child population declined in 23 states, mostly in the Northeast and Midwest, but also in Alabama, Alaska, Louisiana, Maryland, Montana and West Virginia.

Yet, among the 27 states that gained children over the decade, eight states—Arizona, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Nevada, North Carolina, Texas and Utah—saw their child populations grow by more than 10 percent.

Cultural Generation Gaps

The growth of the young "new minorities" contrasted with the aging of the white population can be associated with a new kind of generation gap.

The 2010 census showed that among infants, almost half—49.8 percent—are minorities, and a quarter of these are Latinos. Contrast that to the population age 85 and older, which is 85 percent white with blacks the dominant minority. Granted these are extremes, but they reflect the emerging "cultural generation gap."

Today 40 million people in the United State are 65 or older, and this number is projected to more than double to 89 million by 2050.

Issues important for young minorities—comprehensive immigration reform, improved public schools and affordable housing—contrast with the concerns of boomers and seniors, such as health care and Social Security. This "gap" is currently widest in states with the greatest number of young minorities—Arizona, California, Nevada and Texas. As these young people grow up, they will influence education, the workforce and housing, and will sharpen the differences between young and old in the competition for public resources.

The 2010 census has highlighted the fact that, while it is growing more slowly, the country is on the cusp of great change. Old ideas of what it means to be a minority in America are in the process of changing.

States that are becoming more racially and ethnically diverse tend also to be the fastest growing, and where the population is aging more slowly. This includes areas beyond the Sun Belt and toward the Southeast and Mountain West. This new growth is propelled strongly by Latinos and Asians and, in the case of much of the South, a resurgent growth of blacks. All these changes will affect public policy and politics in states that are gaining more political clout at the national level.

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See an interactive census map at www.ncsl.org/magazine